

Engineering up good ideas for children

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With women accounting for less than 10% of working engineers in Australia, recent engineering graduate Mandy Lau wonders if young women today appreciate just how creative and rewarding an engineering degree can be.

"Engineering's often been considered a boy's degree," she tells *Women's Agenda*. "So many women don't have the opportunity and the exposure to what engineering's really about – it's creative, interesting, you use your hands. I've always had so many ideas, and you can make them happen with engineering."

One such idea Lau had was to create a sensory-based learning toy that exposes young blind and visually impaired children to Braille literacy, something she came up with and developed while completing her Master of Design at Monash University.

And it's an idea that's proven to be a good one. Lou's been named a finalist in the international [James Dyson Award](#), recognising design engineers with the capacity to "Design something that solves a problem", across 18 countries.

Lou's toy, Reach & Match, is a double-sided sensory-based learning tool offering pre-braille learning to toddlers (one side of the toy) and pre-schoolers (the other side) through symbols and tactile patterns. She has collaborated with Vision Australian, Braille teachers, physiotherapists and childhood educators on developing the tool and making a second version.

Lau told *Women's Agenda* she decided to create the toy in response to the global decline of Braille literacy, and concern that the form of writing might fade out. With blindness often associated with other disabilities, including mental retardation, autism and hearing impairment, she says the toy can also help bridge the gaps between children with and without disabilities.

Lou's one of a handful of Australian finalists up for the Dyson Award. The final international shortlist is announced Thursday, with the winner announced in November.

See the toy [in action](#).

This story was found at <http://www.womensagenda.com.au/talking-about/top-stories/engineering-up-good-ideas-for-children/20120917660#.U8yPpY2Sxk4>